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ALIEN CAPITALISM: MARX – PROPHET OF OUR FRACTURED AGE?

ECONOFICTION BARBARISM, CAPITAL, CAPITALISM, MARX, MARXISM

Karl Marx analyzing the incorporation and absorption of the human worker as a mere appendage within the machine had already seen the teleological tendency within capitalism toward our present civilization's fascination with robotics and artificial intelligence: "once adopted into the production process of capital, the means of labour passes through different metamorphoses, whose culmination is the machine, or rather, an automatic system of machinery (system of machinery: the automatic one is merely its most complete, most adequate form, and alone transforms machinery into a system), set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting of numerous mechanical and intellectual organs, so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkages."1

Marx had already seen the movement toward self-autonomous machinic systems, as well as the time when humans would no longer determine but would themselves be determined by the machines within which they were absorbed: "it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. (matières instrumentales), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion. The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself." (ibid., p. 620).

In fact Marx would see the emerging civilization of global capitalism as a machinic organism cannibalizing both human and nonhuman resources as part of its ongoing systematic self-automating processes and wealth creation: "the production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism." (ibid. p. 621).

He would see this as no accident of time or place but rather as the inherent telos of capitalism: "the development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital, in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper." (ibid., p. 622).

Ultimately Marx would equate Civilization itself as Capitalism, and that the top tier live off the workers by extracting from their free time or surplus time the very wealth that makes them fat and happy. The Capitalist lives out his Utopian life at the expense of his slaves, the workers:

He is a capitalist — i.e. representative of capital, personified capital, only by virtue of the fact that he relates to labour as alien labour, and appropriates and posits alien labour for himself. The costs of circulation therefore do not exist in so far as they take away the capitalist's time. His time is posited as superfluous time: not-labour time, not-value-creating time, although it is capital which realizes the created value. The fact that the worker must work surplus labour time is identical with the fact that the capitalist does not need to work, and his time is thus posited as not-labour time; that he does not work the necessary time, either. The worker must work surplus time in order to be allowed to objectify, to realize the labour time necessary for his reproduction. On the other side, therefore, the capitalist's necessary labour time is free time, not time required for direct subsistence. **Since all free time is time for free development, the capitalist usurps the free time created by the workers for society**, i.e. civilization, and Wade is again correct in this sense, in so far as he posits capital = civilization. (ibid., 565-66).

In other words the free time that we could have used with our families, educating ourselves, enjoying life, etc. is stripped from us and reincorporated back into the machinic beast which is civilization itself as capitalism. Very simply put, the worker "sells himself as an effect. He is absorbed into the body of capital as a cause, as activity." Except that in our current era there are vast numbers of human beings, barely at or below subsistence level, who cannot be integrated into the new requirements of markets, and they are irrelevant and expendable. Disposable. Death, in many guises, is one of the by-products of neoliberalism: when people have nothing further that can be taken from them, whether resources or labor power, they are quite simply disposable. However, the current increase in sexual slavery and the growing traffic in organs and body parts suggest that the outer limit of disposability can be profitably enlarged to meet the demands of new market sectors.2

In our age of mediatainment and the infosphere we are all part of an illusionary reality system. As J.G. Ballard reminded us over and over: "We are all living in fictions at the moment, one need not write about it; instead the task of the writer, or any astute inquirer is to uncover what is left of reality." Our leaders encase us in debt, force us to become dependent on them for our livelihoods, our security, our very source of human freedom. Yet, instead of any of these they give us the chains of taxation, 24/7 work days, fear of religious terrorism, eternal war, and the likelihood of endless misery and pain. Yet, we seem to accept this as if there were no other way, as if this was all natural, just the way things are rather than the embellishments of an aesthetic order of calculated planning and ingenuity that has reconfigured the very foundations of democracy over the past sixty years.

A fantasy world of neoliberal fiction and ideology that has subtly worked its propaganda systems shaping Hollywood, major news networks, news papers, journals, think-tanks, academic systems through the pressure of economic power and the nomos of legal and ethical systematic coercion. A system so subtly built over time gradually remaking the Industrial enclaves of the Fordist era, destroying it, decentralizing labor, shifting the old factory systems to the periphery of the globe, while dismantling the unions and their security, the family farm systems, and isolating the workers through divisive politics, multicultural racism, difference, and monetary refinancialization and immaterial subterfuge.

A society in which the world is flattened out across a grid of electronic circuits providing a platform for both non-human and human agents a 24/7 Onlife system of exchanges and transactional arbitration. Technologies and technics based on the emerging ICT technologies (Information and Communications), outsourcing and global networking. These Virtual organizations are "open and temporary coalitions of independent and usually geographically dispersed economic entities, whose structure is being constantly reorganized, whereas the scope and aim of the performed activities depends on the emerging market opportunities".3

Corporatism and Globalism go hand in hand as the twin hands of this artificial enity Marx saw as a vast inorganic machinic organism. Corporatism depends first on our disconnection. The less local, immediate, and interpersonal our experience of the world and each other, the more likely we are to adopt self-interested behaviors that erode community and relationships. This makes us more dependent on central authorities for the things we used to get from one another; we cannot create value without centralized currency, meaning without nationally known brands, or leaders without corporate support. This dependency, in turn, makes us more vulnerable to the pathetically overgeneralized and fear-based mythologies of corporatism. Once we accept these new mythologies as the way things really are, we come to believe that our manufactured disconnection is actually a condition of human nature. In short, we disconnect from the real, adapt to our artificial environment by becoming less than human, and finally mistake carefully constructed corporatist mythologies for the natural universe.4

We have moved inside the infosphere, the all-pervading black box which depends on the extent to which we accept its interface and illusions as integral to our reality matrix and transparent, almost totalistic ubiquity to us (in the sense of no longer perceived

as present). What matters is not so much moving bits instead of atoms— this is an outdated, communication-based interpretation of the information society that owes too much to mass-media sociology— as the far more radical fact that our understanding and conceptualization of the very essence and fabric of reality is changing.5

Addendum:

My friend Dirk informed me of Frank Pasquale's post on *The Emerging Law of Algorithms, Robots, and Predictive Analytics*. The author suggests that advances in information and communications technology and the "datafication" of broadening fields of human endeavor are generating unparalleled quantities and kinds of data about individual and group behavior, much of which is now being deployed to assess risk by governments worldwide. Law enforcement personnel are expected to prevent terrorism through data-informed policing aimed at curbing extremism before it expresses itself as violence. According to Agamben, the signature of a state of exception is 'force-of'; actions that have the force of law even when not of the law. Software is being used to predict which people on parole or probation are most likely to commit murder or other crimes.

The steep rise in the rate of drone attacks during the Obama administration has been ascribed to the algorithmic identification of 'risky subjects' via the disposition matrix. According to interviews with US national security officials the disposition matrix contains the names of terrorism suspects arrayed against other factors derived from data in 'a single, continually evolving database in which biographies, locations, known associates and affiliated organizations are all catalogued.'

The ultimate logic of the algorithmic state of exception may be a homeland of "smart cities," and force projection against an external world divided into "kill boxes." At the moment the military-industrial complex is speeding us toward the development of "human out of the loop" drone swarms, ostensibly because only machines will be fast enough to anticipate the enemy's counterstrategies. The **Age of the Terminator** is upon us…

One can also find the Grundrisse at the Marxist Archive: here…

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1. Marx, Karl. Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy Penguin; New Ed edition (November 24, 2005) (Page 620).
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5. Floridi, Luciano (2013-10-10). The Ethics of Information (p. 17). Oxford University Press, USA. Kindle Edition
6. taken from here
7. Foto: Stefan Paulus

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